

URBAN DREAMING
ART AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PLACE

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**An exegesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts**

School of Visual and performing Arts

University of Tasmania

DECEMBER 2001

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the exegesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment is made in the text of the thesis.



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ABSTRACT

Australia's urban and suburban environments continue to attract the attention of visual artists such as Jeffrey Smart and social commentators such as Elizabeth Grosz, (*Space, Time and Perversion*, 1995) and Chris McAuliffe, (*Art and Suburbia*, 1996). The complexities and patterns within these environments encourage scientific and artistic investigation.

This project explores the links between the body and the built environment of post industrial Launceston through painting, and a supporting exegesis. Rather than being simply an observation, this project has evolved with and is very much a part of the post-industrial redevelopment of the Inveresk Railyards, situated just outside Launceston's Central Business District, into a cultural precinct.

The exegesis is of two parts. The first is reflective, and explores my psychological response to living in an artificial, constructed environment. The second is factual, looking at the history and development of the Western City. Between the two parts I ask, 'Is the city a place that is good for us... is it where we want to be?'

My intent has been to create images that represent the contemplation of people and place. The images I create are generated from the feelings I experience living within the contemporary urban environment. The stylized, constructed nature of my work mirrors a rigid permanency encountered in our urban and suburban spaces and attempts to fully experience an elusive state of being.

Through painting, I explore the built environment as thought – as an idea or a feeling made visual. These images are a new interpretation and evoke new perspectives on the Inveresk precinct. It is important for human beings to constantly check their relationship to place in order to understand the intricacies of the body/ city interface. My work presents a personal visualisation of our body/ city relation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express my thanks to my supervisors, Dr Deborah Malor and Penny Mason for their inspiring support. Their informed guidance and accessibility was invaluable and greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank Professor Vincent McGrath and all the staff and students at the School of Visual and Performing Arts for providing stimulating group critiques and general encouragement, and my close friends for their interest and affirmation.

I could not have stuck at it for so long without the ongoing financial and emotional support of my parents to whom I am forever grateful.

This Project is dedicated to Rebecca, for her genuine excitement and creative energy, and for her encouragement and belief that I could do it.

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INTRODUCTION

1.

My work is about the relationship between the built environment and our selves. I am interested in the buildings that we occupy and how we feel about those buildings. Part of my work involves looking into my personal psychological response to this environment.

My proposal, that is, what I aimed to achieve in developing this project, has evolved markedly since the first draft at the beginning of my research. I have moved from a general interest in the urban and suburban condition of Australia to an investigation that concentrates on people and place. I ask the question: 'Can I achieve through the medium of paint, an aesthetic which mixes our conscious and subconscious states with a place, an outside?' I am interested in the idea of inside becoming outside, that is, I intend to bring what is normally unseen, or 'thought', conscious or unconscious, to a place we can see – the image, the painting. As an artist I view my work as part of a perpetual process of moving from inside to outside and back. This process begins with the original idea for a building (inside/body), the realization of the building – its physical reality (outside/built environment), the effect of the built environment on my self (inside/body), and the attempt to take that effect to a viewable outside through painting (outside). I will look further into this model of inside/outside later in Part One of the exegesis.

Initially I had wanted to investigate the psychological effect the built environment has on others and myself. This is still true but I have now approached this aim by looking at the history of the body as a metaphor for the city through architecture. I have also chosen a specific site, the Inveresk Railyards at Launceston, to represent the built environment in my

work. I therefore moved from having a general idea of what I wanted to investigate to developing a more refined idea of how to carry out the investigation by locating the sites of discussion. The location of the 'significance' of my work has also shifted. Originally I based the project's significance around the ideas formed during my Honors year, that is I planned to tackle the project by looking at the more suburban-oriented artists such as Howard Arkley and writers such as Chris McAuliffe, author of *Art and Suburbia*, (1996) a study of art that draws on the Australian sub/urban tradition.

I planned to employ their ideas as a template for my own investigations. Now I see the significance has shifted to a focus on the influence of built spaces on people and how this is portrayed by artists such as Jeffrey Smart and thinkers such as Elizabeth Grosz, author of *Space, Time and Perversion*,¹ and Joseph Rykwert, author of *The Dancing Column*.² Beyond this I will be looking at architecture as a subject of painting and the location of the body in this environment.

2.

I paint directly from photographs I have taken. Jeffrey Smart, Russell Drysdale and Francis Bacon used, with variations, the photographic method. I look to these painters for direction in my work. The photograph can capture a moment in time. Bacon often used photographs of men wrestling or an ape shaking its head violently. He wanted the dynamism of movement captured through photography in his paintings. I believe these painters used photography so they had something to paint from when in the studio, aside from interpretive material such as drawings. Taking a photograph (or using someone else's), helps to isolate the subject within a frame. It is another form of investigation. For me it is a way of referring to and not losing

sight of the original idea. It gives me time to visually understand the subject as an aesthetic, and therefore to go on to develop a painting. Once I have selected some photos with potential, I cut and paste, bring together and take away until an image is composed that may work as a painting. This is how I observe and 'know' my subject – a critical part of the painting process.

3.

The Inveresk Railyards and the adjacent Central Business District (CBD) of Launceston have been primary sources of visual information. I began with the Launceston CBD but the Railyards seemed to have the energy I was looking for. They hold a sense of history. They are monumental architecturally, symbols of the spirit of industry and the work ethic, once supporting the people with their columns of concrete, their presence and importance re-affirmed in the recent redevelopment. Before I discovered the railyards I searched the CBD of Launceston for the images which held my ideas, photographing any part of a building – a door, a window or the stairwell of a car park. I also photographed streetscapes such as the Quadrant and Brisbane Street Malls. This visual exploration alluded to but did not capture the 'mood' I sought.

A big part of the power of the Railyards site lies in the fact that it is a single entity, a self-confident structure harmonious within itself and separate from the more everyday of the CBD. This is why I find the site so inspirational. I need as subject matter buildings that symbolize strength and unity and have stood the test of time. I am interested in the power we give our buildings. Most importantly the enigmatic architecture of the Railyards links together the artists relevant to my ideas and my work. Artists such as Bacon, Smart, Stephen

Campbell, Leanora Carrington, Giorgio de Chirico, Charles Demuth, Paul Delvaux, James Ensor, Paul Nash, Paula Rego and Pierre Roy inspire me. Using the aesthetic of the Railyards, I attempt to create something similar to one or all of the artists mentioned – a contemporary experience of the melancholy of de Chirico or a Tasmanian interpretation of the urbanism of Smart. Especially before the recent redevelopment, the numerous courtyards and corridors of the site (soon to become a centre for the arts) echoed the eerie melancholic half-light of de Chirico's work. Now that the redevelopment process is approaching completion, with shiny corrugated iron, paved walkways and coloured bitumen carpark, one thinks of Smart before de Chirico, but the little girl with her hoop is still there.

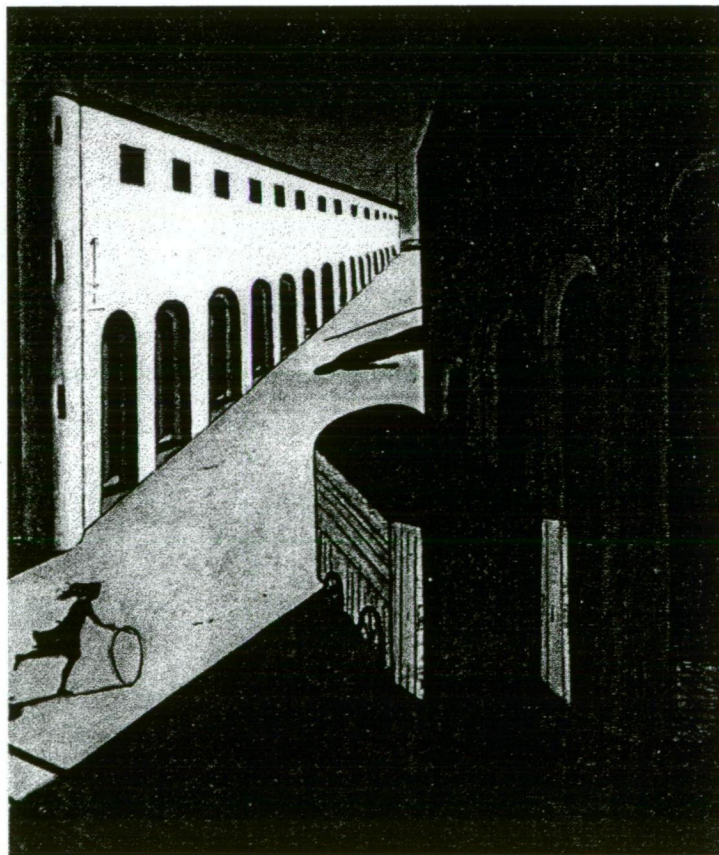


Illustration 1

4.

The process of my working between inside and outside is underpinned by two main themes – a nature/culture relation, and a culture/culture relation. The *nature* part of my work is mainly sky and sometimes barren landscape. It acts as a frame for the *culture* part of my work.

Nature supports and provides a space for me to experiment with the culture/culture binary of people and place. The nature/culture relationship in my work is constant throughout. Nature supports and provides room for, and is therefore visually subordinated by culture, and to some degree becomes culture, in that it is a highly stylized *nature*. I sometimes paint the clouds to appear cartoon-like in a sky of unusually intense blue or red, giving it a surreal quality that becomes part of the built environment. The sky appears artificial – constructed like the buildings to be later painted into it. This gives the sky a connection with the buildings but nature is not entirely synthesized. I retain the ‘nature’ enough to still be recognized as sky, creating the degree of contrast needed for the nature/culture relationship, and therefore the structure of the painting, to work. To convey the culture/culture binary I paint the buildings I see around me and also a suggestion of the creators/ inhabitants of those buildings. I move from suggestion to detail, from abstract to icon to capture the many dimensions of, and the many ways we view, architecture. I paint the figure within this architecture, usually painting myself since the project is about my perception and experience. A building can suggest a human presence well enough on its own. In this case the figure is absent – reinforcing the idea of an alienating architecture, a world left behind for a better place – the pursuit of the *ideal city* continues.

5.

I am looking for dialogue between the cultural forms I have chosen. I want strong structural forms to contrast not only with natural elements, but to contrast with and complement each other. I want to see a tension within the image; a mood that reflects the often-alienating nature of a built environment that separates us from nature and from ourselves. I am not looking for the nature/culture binary to run throughout my work, rather, my main focus is on the creation of images using the built environment as the subject to convey the psychological effect of this environment, rather than an environmental impact study. We do have an impact on our environment, but I am interested in the impact our environment has on us. Rather than nature/culture I am looking at culture/culture; that is, the communication between people and the built environment.

PART ONE.

1:1

My work is fundamentally about the relationship between the inside (human consciousness) and the outside (built environment). In her book *Space, Time and Perversion*, Elizabeth Grosz looks at the interface between the body and the city from the idea of changing the way we 'think' architecture.³ From this perspective architecture is the inside and everything else, everything that is different to or beyond architecture, is the outside. Grosz considers that the ideas of philosopher Gilles Deleuze could have important implications for architecture. She describes Deleuze's project as thinking about how to think – to think while making and while doing, to think as doing. Grosz asks the question, 'Does Deleuze's work have something to offer in re-thinking spatiality and its constitutive discourses?'⁴

Grosz continues,

If Deleuze is the thinker of movement, of difference, the cartographer of force rather than form... if his goal is to produce a certain quaking or stuttering then his work may provide a point of mobilization in the ongoing movement to destabilize and rethink space, place, building and architecture.⁵

Grosz is interested in opening up architecture to the outside, asking, 'Can architecture inhabit us as much as we see ourselves inhabiting it?' She gives a detailed answer to this question in the chapter entitled 'Bodies Cities' (which I will look at in more detail later in Part 1).⁶ From her discussion it is clear that Grosz believes architecture already does inhabit us, pointing out that the body and the city are mutually defining and that one does not simply mirror the other, but between them exists an interface. For an interface to exist one must inhabit the other to a greater or lesser degree. How does architecture inhabit us? In *The Architecture of Alienation* David Clarke suggests that generally people don't think about architecture much

at all, at least not consciously.⁷ He says that people aren't fussed about the intellectualization of architecture and that 'They just want to feel good in and around it without a lot of muss and fuss.'⁸ Does this mean that Grosz is wasting her time? Clarke believes art and intellectualism to be the reasons why architects have lost their ability to give people what they want. He says few people would disagree that 'art went to hell in a hand basket in the twentieth century',⁹ a comment so general it is ridiculous. He cites the development of the camera as the reason for painting's transition from traditional to modern art, and that art's relationship with architecture has suffered from this transition, that is draughtsmanship and craftsmanship have all but disappeared with the rise of modern art, and architecture has followed the same path:

As the art market became thin and two tiered so did the architectural market. You can have a concept with little skill or no concept with lots of skill... it has not been necessary to know how to draw in most architectural schools since 1960...the architecture produced reflected such limits perfectly.¹⁰

He follows with the assertion that,

When art lost its pedagogical and representational utility as a core of meaning it should have lost its connection with architecture, but it did not and as art moved into the obscure areas of modernism and postmodernism architecture followed... unsuccessfully.¹¹

Clarke appears misinformed; the 'obscure' area of Postmodernism began in architecture, not art. It is clear that Clarke does not approve of modern art:

I really don't care if people slather their interiors with Bacon's gore, de Kooning's misogyny or Warhole's banality. It's when they stick it on the outside for the rest of us to put up with that I become upset and get fearful for my profession's future.¹²

On intellectualism in architecture Clarke wrote that the public is not interested in the theory of a building and if architects would try to be less self- important they would be more important to society. Instead of maintaining a purely intellectual culture at American

universities, Clarke asserts students would be better contributors to society if they became more like planners and made serious attempts to improve the quality of life – since the nineteen sixties students receive no practical training and instead are told to adopt ‘strong explicit formal theoretical positions’.¹³

Clarke believes many architects are not building for the people. This is probably true but why is he blaming it on art? My essay is about human centredness – about the human body as a basis for building since Vitruvius. If you look deeply enough, the body as a basis for building is essentially an idea stemming from artistic expression rather than purely functional means. Look at Rykwert’s *The Dancing Column* – it’s not called *The Static Column*. Art is a basis for architecture. To wish for art and architecture to be totally separate, as Clarke espouses, would be suicide for both disciplines.

According to Clarke the American architect of today is fundamentally self-centred; detached from the everyday practice of living in their creation:¹⁴ ‘People don’t want the best architecture existing in some Plutonic noosphere, they want good architecture everywhere.’¹⁵ What is Clarke’s idea of good architecture? How can architecture be good, if it is artless? How could I express my ideas without architecture? For me art, architecture and my ideas are inseparably intertwined.

In ‘Bodies/Cities’ Grosz explores how the reality of the physical body (corporeality) and the nature of the physical body (corporeal) relate to the city.¹⁶ Here Grosz examines the theoretical issues around which my work is based, problematising traditional notions of corporeality; that is, the oppositions by which the body has been understood; mind/body,

opposition between male and female.¹⁷ Grosz explores how the body is produced psychically, socially, sexually and representationally by society. She believes the city is a crucial factor in the social production of corporeality, that is, the built environment provides the context and coordinates for contemporary forms of body.¹⁸ Grosz's models of the reciprocal relationship between bodies and cities are addressed in the following section.

1:2

Before looking at two pervasive models on the interrelation between bodies and cities Grosz defines her understanding of the two key terms, body and city. She describes the body as an animate object of flesh and bone that is incomplete until stimulated by environment and which defines reality with the help of the mother and the 'Other' (language and culture).¹⁹ The city is an ever-changing built environment where political and economic networks are organized, and where disparate social activities, processes and relations are linked together.²⁰

The first model puts forward a cause and effect relationship between the body and the city, that is, bodies produce cities. Grosz has two problems with this model. First, she says it subordinates the body to the mind and, second, that it only posits a one-way relation between the body (cause) and city (effect). Grosz does not detail the problems of a one way body/city relation, nor how the body is subordinated by the city in this model, in fact, it would appear the city is subordinate, being produced by and as an effect of the body. The second model explored suggests the body and city exist in a state of 'isomorphism' – that they are understood as congruent counterparts where features of one are reflected in the other. In this example the shape and geographical organization of the city is modeled on the form of the human body. Here the human body is used as a metaphor for the state (mind) and the city

(body). Grosz has problems with the second model also. One problem is the masculinization of the body politic in the masculine coding of the parts, that is, the King represents the center of politics – the mind, the head of the human body. Another problem is the opposition between nature (body) and culture (city). Here Grosz says nature works as passivity under culture that works as male (cultural) productivity superseding female (natural) reproduction: that culture is a suppression and perfection of nature.²¹ She does not go on to describe how or why nature is passive and culture dominant in this binary. A third problem for Grosz is the political function of this analogy. She characterizes the human body as a natural form of organization which functions not only for the good of each organ but for the good of the whole, while the body politic is essentially a hierarchical system.

Grosz's first two problems with the second model for 'Bodies/Cities', the representational model, are well founded. She is working against a model created by males in a male-dominated society. However, the third problem, the difference between the wholeness of the body and the hierarchy of the body politic may not be justified. I believe the human body *and* the body politic work for the good of each part and for the good of the whole, while both are essentially hierarchical systems – not just the body politic (e.g. preserving the vital organs takes priority when the body is seriously injured). Grosz believes a better model for bodies and cities can be constructed using elements from each of the two models already introduced. She points out the first view is causal but that bodies and cities are not causally linked because every cause must be logically distinct from its effect – the city and the body are mutually defining. Her view then is like the second view, the representational model, where

the body represents the city and vice versa; but Grosz stresses it is not simply one mirroring the other, rather it is a two way linkage, an interface.

1:3

The interface of body and city is well described visually by Australian-born painter Jeffrey Smart. Smart uses the figure for structure and composition, where the body and the city are integral parts of and extensions of each other, reflecting Grosz's interface. In his 'Foreword' to *The Art of Jeffrey Smart*, the book accompanying Smart's 1999 retrospective, Edmond Capon describes Smart's work;

Smart's pictures are redolent with curiosity; the sense of place is forever ambiguous; but we feel a sense of recognition, familiarity. The vocabulary of his visual language is one of our times but his composition is, in its discipline and tension, a devotion to the standards of the High Renaissance.²²

Smart has stated that his 'only concern is putting the right shapes and the right colours in the right places. It is always geometry.'²³ Capon wonders if we can accept this, as Smart insists, as the ultimate cause and objective of his work. I think, as Smart contests, this really is what he is aiming for, but in this case the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Something else is created, something unexpected, from Smart's original plan of colour and composition. Capon sees this 'something else' as 'an utter stillness evoking a sense of detachment, where the air is still, time is held in suspense and familiar symbols and practical modernity become icons... having a wonderful urbanity that is close to a polite cynicism.'²⁴ Capon does not accept that Smart's work is about melancholy and isolation, as many commentators have suggested. Although Smart often creates an achingly barren desolate image of our urban environment, and the figure is often alone and painted purely for compositional ends, his people are never sad; they are not crying out for company. Many are even smiling, gazing

smugly back at the viewer. As if they have been denaturalised by the structured environment around them, like the nature becoming culture in my own work. *The Flea Market, Rome*, (1966) is a good example of Smart's denaturalisation of the body.



Illustration 2

Capon describes Smart's process of evolution from textural detail in his early work to a more rigorous, structured, pristine aesthetic. As a result of this process the role of symbol and sign becomes more important. Capon writes, 'the power of an apparently quite arbitrary moment... the 'quite incidental' (quotation marks are mine) piece of red hosepipe looped over *The Road Dividers*, (1988-89)

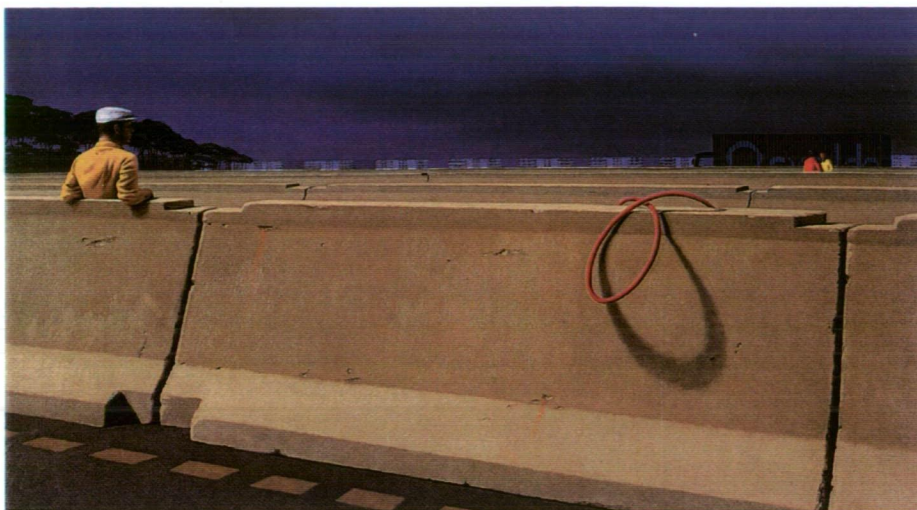


Illustration 3

become staples of the composition however slight their scale may be.²⁵ Because composition is paramount, the integrity of a Smart painting sometimes suffers. The piece of hosepipe in *The Road Dividers* is so obviously a compositional device it becomes too easily read. It's as if we know why it's there, so perhaps it would be more interesting if it weren't, or if a less predictable means of achieving balance was used. To be too composed is a problem for Smart's work. A good example of this is *Margaret Olley in the Louvre Museum*, (1994-95)

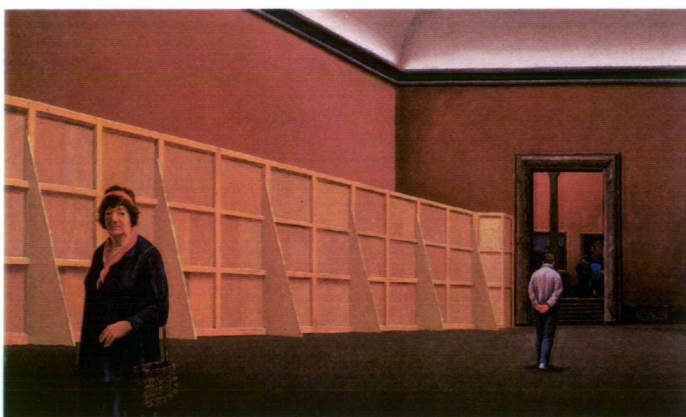


Illustration 4

This painting shows how Smart's obsession with composition takes away from the integrity of the work. His figures have become structure; stilted and lifeless, especially that of Margaret Olley herself. Smart's figures often appear awkward and stiff. *Conducted Tour*, (1970)

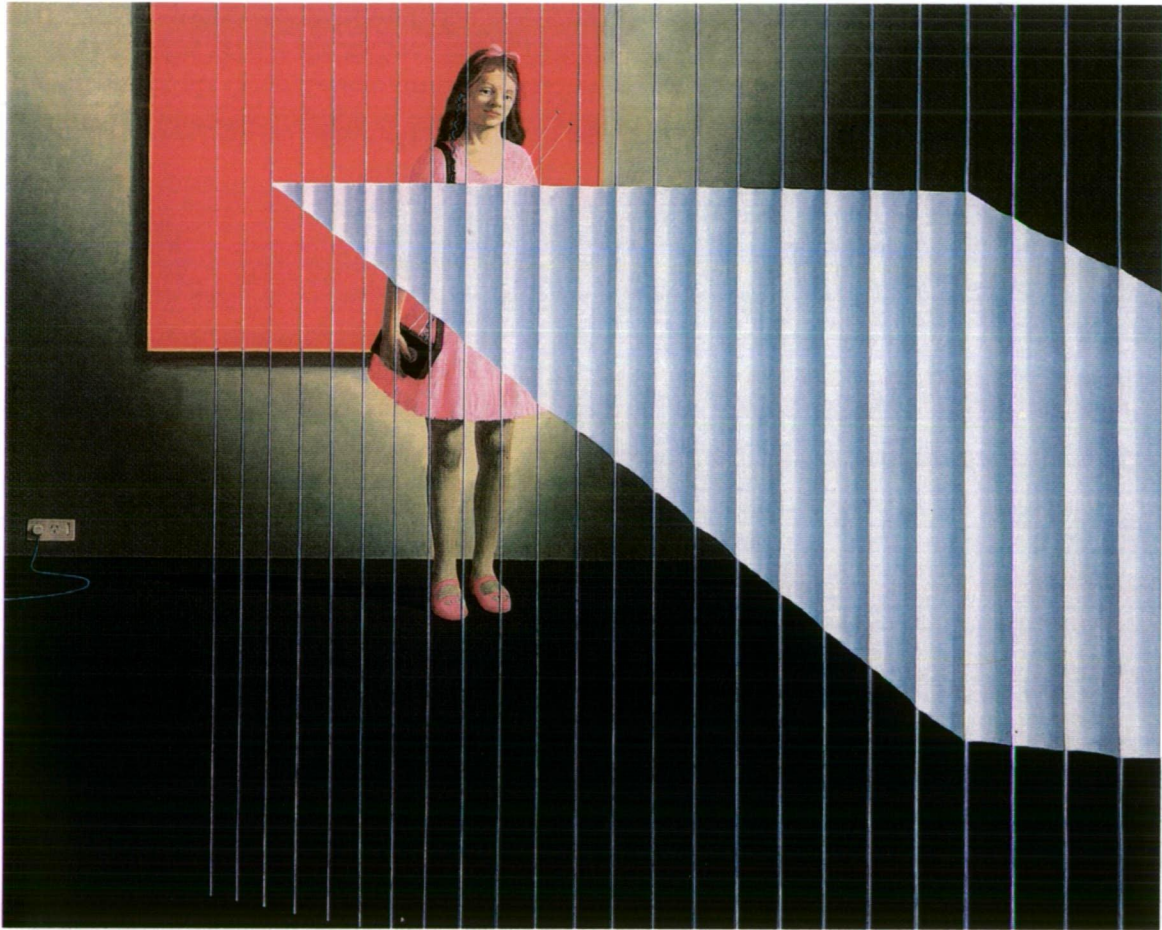


Illustration 5

shows Smart's reluctance to paint genuine expression into a human face. The girl stares at the museum piece with a dumb, doll like quality. Her limbs do not appear human, but rather as if they are made of plastic, structured – denatured. If one paints the body as structure, as Smart does, it is bound to take on an unnatural quality. This is probably exactly what Smart wants –

to show how the built environment can take the life out of its inhabitants, although he has always denied trying to convey such a message. As Deborah Malor has written ‘the arrangement of objects is in many ways so dominant that their identity is incidental.’²⁶ Smart sees his figures as objects. On Smart’s painting, *Sunday Morning 11*, (1975)



Illustration 6

Malor writes of ‘the seated men, whose shapes act as both extensions and counterpoints of the shadow, the tower, the overhead lines. The taking up of human form as architecture...’²⁷ Perhaps a more successful attempt at figure painting by Smart is in *Castelfusano*, (1970)

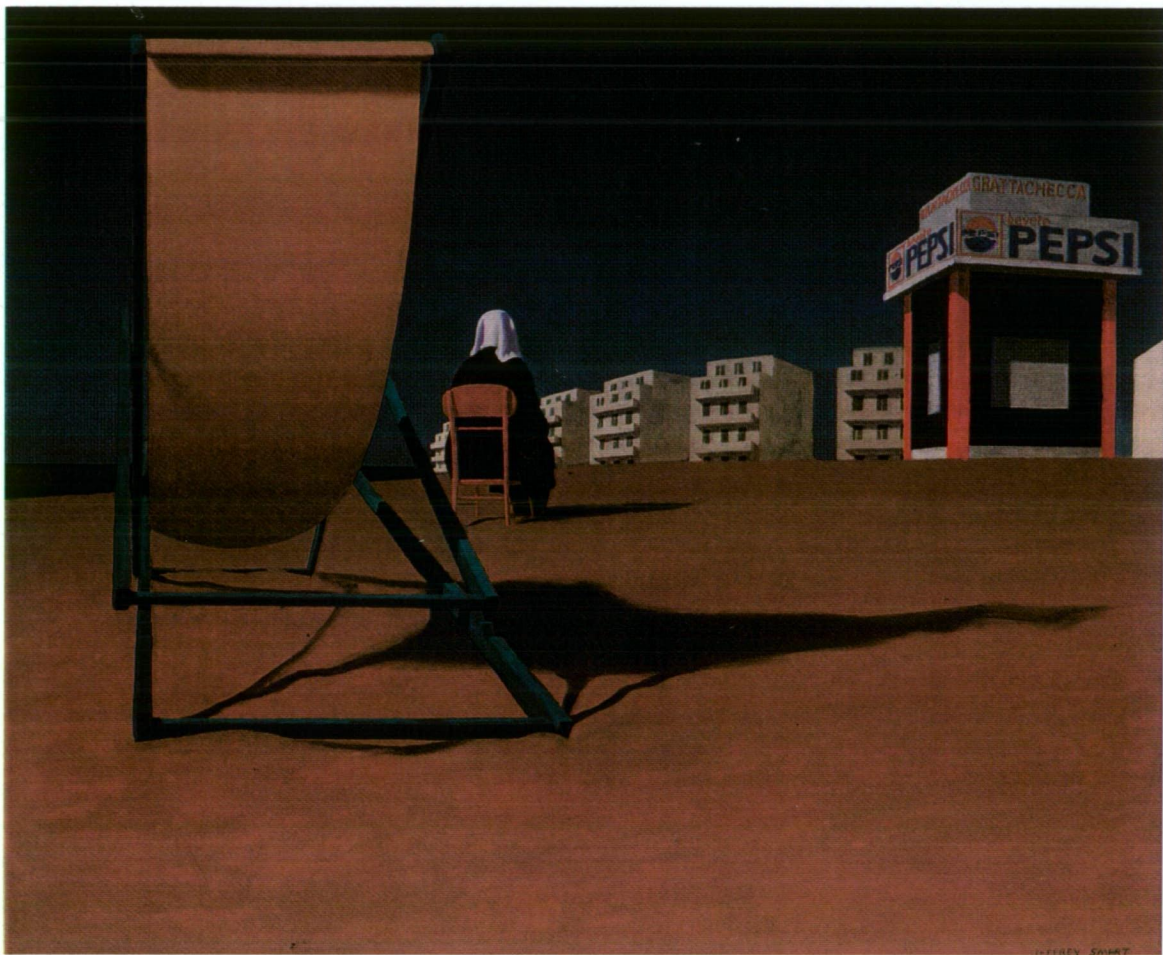


Illustration 7

Here the body is seated, avoiding the usual stiffness, and the head is covered with a towel. Capon comments that ‘it is of course a classic and characteristic paradox that Smart should employ the symbols of modernity, of anxiety, tension, pressure and activity such as autostradas, road signs and trucks, and transform them into fixtures of serenity.’²⁸ Perhaps

part of the serenity is generated through the fact that these are paintings. We are distanced from the image, the feeling one gets when one watches a busy highway from a distance, through a window, where the cars look like ants hurrying to the next job in a busy silence. The subject matter reminds us of the metropolis but the composition is the key to the brooding silence of Smart's work. A highway with only one truck, an urban street with a lone figure staring at the viewer – these images of beautiful portentous skies above empty urban environments generate a feeling of stillness in us that could be said to mirror the empty stillness felt by many living the real urban experience. It is an interesting and successful twist that Smart's figures, compositionally existing as an extension of the built environment he creates, often appear dislocated emotionally from their 'denatured' surroundings, as mentioned earlier, his figures are sometimes even smiling, gazing implacably back at the viewer. Perhaps, like the plastic appearance of his figures, this indifference in facial expression is the perfect extension of a body which is an extension of a building – emotionally shallow: a smile to cover the pain of living in an artificial world – a façade stronger and more impenetrable than the building that inspired it.

1:4

Smart uses classical proportion and symmetry in the construction of an image. It could be considered ironic that the human figure is merely an extension of the overpowering built environment in his work, when to be 'classical' is to have the human body as the basis for architecture. In his book *The Dancing Column*, Joseph Rykwert quotes Jacob Burckhardt, who, in 1850 gave his impression of Doric temples:

The Greeks worked through the idealized treatment of form rather than mass. The first device is the narrowing of the column at the top...which assures the eye that the column cannot be overturned; next are the flutes. They signify that the column is

condensing and hardening as it were, gathering its strength. At the same time, they emphasize the upward thrust... the powerful pressure (of the beams) spread its upper ending into a swelling- the *Euchinus*... Its profile is the most important measure of strength in every Doric temple; at its base it is edged by three channels, like the folds of a delicate, slack outer skin.²⁹

This statement is an example of what an individual is capable of reading into a building. It suggests that people are incapable of viewing a building or, I would argue, any object, without giving it human qualities and dimensions... note the words *strength*, *thrust*, *swelling* and *skin*. Burckhardt leaves plenty of room for a feminist interpretation of the same structure.

The origins of the body as a basis for design can be traced back 1900 years earlier to the time of Marcus Pollio Vitruvius, a Roman (and widely regarded as the first 'professional') architect who, in old age, wrote the treatise *The Ten Books on Architecture* in the first century BC. In Chapter One of the Third Book Vitruvius writes about the importance and proportion and symmetry in the design of temples and the basis for this architecture – the human body,

Without symmetry and proportion there can be no principles in the design of any temple; that is, if there is no precise relation between its members as in the case of a well shaped man.³⁰

Vitruvius then describes the proportional relationships of the human body – the relationship of different parts of the body to the height of the body, the dividing up of the face into equal thirds. He then proposes the familiar Davincian symbol of symmetry, where man, his navel at the centre, fits neatly into a circle if the arms and legs are extended and into a square if the arms are outstretched.

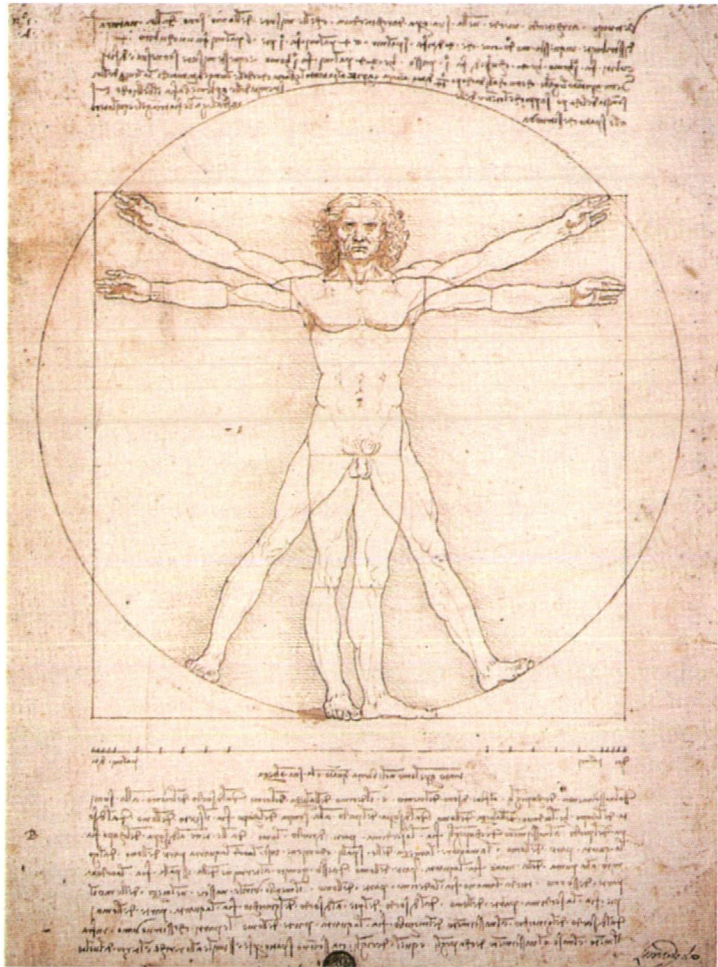


Illustration 8

Vitruvius concludes,

Therefore since nature designed the human body so that its members are duly proportional to the frame as a whole it appears the ancients had good reason for their rule that in perfect building the different members must be in exact symmetrical relation to the whole general scheme. Further, it was from the members of the body they derived the fundamental ideas of the measures, which are obviously necessary in all works.³¹

Vitruvius obviously believed that successful architecture depended upon 'correct' symmetry and proportion. He thought that if the body is designed with such symmetry and pleasing

proportion, and if the measures are based on certain parts of the body such as finger, palm, toe and foot, then building must be body-based, and similarly pleasing.

In *The Dancing Column*, Joseph Rykwert cites the interest of Charles Blanc, author of *Grammaire des Arts du Dessin*, (1860), in the parallel between the horizontality of classical architecture and the lines of a serene human face.³² Blanc thought this parallel seemed to demonstrate that the architecture of a beam and column inevitably suggested calm, submission to fate and long duration. It is interesting to note here that the faces in Jeffrey Smart's paintings are never contorted into extreme expression – they are serene examples of his devotion to classicism, while other perhaps more gestural, body-centred artists such as Francis Bacon or Brett Whiteley were not seeking the harmony of Smart but are known for their distortion of the face and the body and its environment, all being pushed and pulled to the very limits of perception.

I think most people would agree that human beings do see a lot more than bricks and mortar when looking at a building, even if the many things we read are mostly background, subconscious processes. Molly Bang in *Picture This: Perception and Composition*, gives an excellent account of what happens when we analyze these processes; that is, what is behind the feelings we experience when looking at a given image.³³ In the foreword to Bang's book, Rudolf Arnheim writes, 'These simple shapes animated by Molly Bang do more than tell a story, they offer an order... a kind of grammar for the eyes, a recipe for yet further things to say.'³⁴

Bang presents a revealing study of the structure behind a given image and its effect on our emotions. She uses the story of Little Red Riding Hood to explain her ideas, beginning with a red triangle (Little Red Riding Hood) and placing it amongst some black vertical lines of varying thickness (the forest).

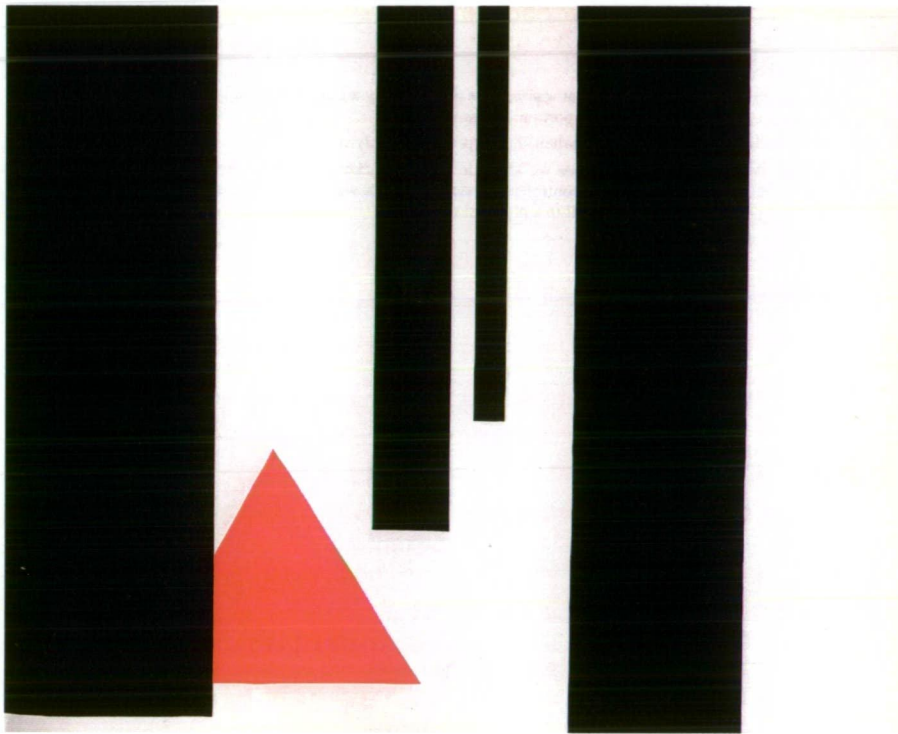


Illustration 9

From there Bang shapes and shifts the image, introducing the wolf (made of sharp triangles) and explaining why Little Red Riding Hood looks vulnerable and the forest and the wolf scary.



Illustration 10

After the story Bang includes a set of principles. The first of these principles reads,

Smooth flat horizontal shapes give us a sense of calm... and the second reads... Vertical shapes are more exiting and more active. Vertical shapes rebel against the Earth's gravity, they imply energy and a reaching towards the heights or heavens.

Bang elaborates,

if a horizontal bar is placed on top of a row of verticals stability reigns again as in a Greek temple... [note here the writings of Vitruvius and Burckhardt]... the sense of vitality and reaching towards the heavens has been checked. But the verticals give the horizontal aspect some regal quality. There is order and stability and the pride goes with the height. When we change from a state of infancy to toddlerhood and rise up of the floor on two strong legs life is much more exiting. Not only are we above all sorts off things that used to be at our own level, not only can we begin to move faster, but life is more exiting because we can fall.³⁵

Bang continues her tale by drawing a metaphor for stability – learning to walk. Here one is reminded of Grosz's idea of bodily administration; that is, the body as a series of uncoordinated potentialities that requires social triggering and ordering.³⁶ Vitruvius' and

Burckhardt's concepts of body and architecture also reinforce the humanness we give to architecture. Burckhard observed, 'the column cannot be overturned...the column is gathering its strength'; and Vitruvius philosophized, 'as the body is ordered within itself and its relationship to the outside so the basis for architecture must be so ordered'. It is clear that not only do we put ourselves before architecture, but also we put ourselves into architecture, that is we see ourselves as architecture. When we look at a building from within or without we feel as if, like us, the building is alive.

BETWEEN BODY AND ENVIRONMENT

I have looked at the body as a metaphor for building. With this in mind I ask the question; 'Is this (the city) a place that is good for us... is it where we want to be?' To me it is a strange paradox that architecture, namely the urban and suburban environment, can have an alienating effect on individuals, that is the individual can feel alienated from their environment and from other people, when the body has always been central to building. The negative effects of urban living manifest only when urban planning puts the structure and form of the city before the individual.

In order to understand our relationship with the built environment in greater depth I have also taken another approach to the site. I intend the second half of the exegesis to reveal the background for the contemplative first half, to peel back the canvas, to explore the phenomenon of city before body.

PART 2

2:1

My interest lies in the form of Australia's cities and how they have evolved and ordered themselves. It is generally accepted that without cities we would have no civilization. In *Building the 21st Century Home* David Rudlin and Nicholas Falk look at the evolution of the city in the United Kingdom, comparing British and United States cities with the continental model. Rudlin and Falk look at Siena in Italy as the archetypal pre-industrial compact city...

It is these cities which predate the industrial revolution and the motorcar which retain their appeal and have given rise to the urban qualities that we still prize today and on which much urban design thinking is founded.³⁷

To understand why the pre-industrial city was built in such a compact way Rudin and Falk look beyond the physical limitations such as travel by foot and the protection of agricultural land, to the human psyche, suggesting that, '...historically there was something deep within the human consciousness which sought companionship and security. It may be that this dates back to the earliest encampments clustered around the communal fire.'³⁸ Rudlin and Falk suggest the campfire evolved into the town square. The elite of the town, the merchants, nobles, church men and administrators vied for the best locations in the centre, while the town's periphery housed the poorest people. This gave rise to the term *suburb* originally meaning less than urban. Rudin and Falk point out the origin of the form of the industrial city:

The industrial revolution placed such intense pressure on the traditional city that it reversed its polarity of settlements. In the modern Anglo-American City the pressure for development is not at the center but at the periphery.³⁹

Rudlin and Falk cite increasing mobility, changing retail and business needs, the workings of the land market and demographic change as the reasons behind this *counterurbanization*.⁴⁰

With the invasion by industry came the idea that the city was bad and the country good. The city centre became a place where only the poorest could not escape. Rudin and Falk use the example of Manchester, where 'In 1841 the average life expectancy was just 24 years and thousands from all classes were killed in the great cholera epidemics of 1832, 1848 and 1866.'⁴¹ People had to escape from the industrial city. A developing periphery left a depraved city center. The move into the country had begun.

In the 20th century the suburban flight of the merchants was followed by the middle classes and eventually even by the working classes as public transport networks were established. This phenomenon is the reason behind the classic Anglo-American city with, 'an embattled center surrounded by decline and an outer ring of prosperous suburbs.'⁴² Rudlin and Falk mention the many British and American government initiatives since the 1970's to deal with this problem, but once people in the city center are empowered, they simply use that power to move to the suburbs: 'A society where most of the people living in cities are those without the capacity to escape will always be a divided society.'⁴³ Rudlin and Falk caution one only need look at American towns and cities to see that if these trends continue unchecked the city center itself can die: that we need to break the Anglo-American mould of thinking about cities, which has characterized British and Australian culture for much of the 20th century. They suggest looking at Continental cities which have been shaped by very different forces and seem to be faring much better as living communities and that cities on the continent may have followed the British and Anglo-American model if it wasn't for Napoleon's 'vision for

Paris': 'Napoleon saw Paris as the capital of a great empire and wanted the physical form of the city to reflect this.'⁴⁴ He hired the architect Hausmann to cut great boulevards through the cramped medieval city, bounded by buildings designed to attract the middle class and stopping their move to the suburbs. This means that Paris has retained the traditional pre-industrial pattern of growth.

In terms of urban growth the developed world can therefore be divided into two traditions: the Anglo-American model [which also characterizes Australia] and the French model which characterizes most of Europe, Latin America and to a lesser extent Canada.⁴⁵

Rudlin and Falk believe we must focus our attention on the continental model if we are to rediscover the benefits of living in the hearts of towns and cities. In the section 'The Urban Renaissance', Rudlin and Falk say that the predictions of the death of the city has been greatly exaggerated and that many British towns and cities seem to be finding new roles.⁴⁶ While there are still problems with traffic pollution and crime, the stage may be set for an urban renaissance in Britain, citing cities as important transport hubs with rail, motorway and airport connections. Cities may also benefit from the growth of service industries such as financial services and cultural or knowledge industries such as music, design and publishing. Rudlin and Falk mention urban universities as important to the life of cities and their economies, as isolated campuses lose out to the urban universities with the culture and nightlife to attract students.⁴⁷

This can be seen in cities as diverse as Liverpool and Sunderland which benefit greatly from high student stay on rates. Former art students account for the fact that Sunderland, despite its size and location, was the Arts Council's 'City of Visual Arts' and is the place for the only national magazine for artists.⁴⁸

Rudin and Falk say that American cities are starting to recognize the potential of people in cities with time and money to spend and that such American initiatives have exploited

continental ideas about urban space. Australia would do well to look also at Continental Europe for new ideas of urban spaces. Like the American cities Australia's love affair with the suburbs takes the life out of the city centre.

2:2

Moving from the international to the regional, Australian cities nowadays are essentially Anglo-American in structure. Lionel Frost, in his book *Australian Cities in Comparative View*, is concerned with understanding urban Australia through comparing Australian cities with each other and with major cities overseas. 'One appreciates' he writes, 'the affluence of Australia more fully after visiting India. A visit to New York or Manchester emphasizes the low density of our cities, just as Glasgow and Leeds highlight the quality and spaciousness of average Australian housing.'⁴⁹ Frost focuses on the 19th century form of urban Australia highlighting the distinction between the early 'compact' cities of Sydney, Brisbane and Hobart (like the early American cities on the East coast) and the sprawling jumbo cities of Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth (like the later frontier cities of the American West.) Frost first looks at Sydney, Brisbane and Hobart. He notes that easy shipping access and availability of fresh water was crucial to the selection of sites for the settlements; in each case the town's site was in very close proximity to its harbor and riverfront and grew in an unplanned compact fashion; a microcosm of the physical pattern of growth exhibited in the high density 19th century cities of Europe. Of Sydney, Frost says as the public transport system developed a number of problems access to the suburban edge became costly and difficult thereby retarding the provision of new and spacious housing.⁵⁰ Residential densities increased as the provision of new housing lagged behind population growth, while inadequate water supply and sewage systems hastened the environmental decay of the inner

city. Though in a land of plenty and lacking huge numbers of low income immigrants because of the cost of getting to Australia, Sydney served as a typical example of any number of British, European or American cities which had also had to cope with the stress of surging population growth.⁵¹ By 1890 Sydney, like the British, European and American cities, began to experience the horrors of urban decay. The industrial revolution attracted many to the city, but only a few could afford to travel on the new public transport system out to the serenity of the suburbs; Sydney was experiencing counterurbanization. The majority of the population had to live within walking distance of their place of employment: 'Physically and spatially 19th century Sydney was very much a product of its rather rudimentary public transport system.'⁵² Frost wrote of how the country representatives dominated the New South Wales parliament of 1880 and their interests were not with urban infrastructure, but with the producers, the farmers: 'Time and time again rural members blocked bills for the improvement of Sydney's public transport.'⁵³ The urban population increased faster than housing stock could be built. Frost describes the horrible living conditions of 19th century Sydney with its overcrowding, its sewage problems due to lack of amenities, and the resulting problems of disease, but compared to overseas Sydney was not an especially unhealthy city. Its overall death rate, which averaged around 18 per thousand of the population in the second half of the 1880's, was well below that of the largest United States cities with an average of 23 per thousand in 1890. Most European cities averaged at least 20 per thousand throughout the 1890's and 1900's.⁵⁴

Frost compares the 'compact' cities of Sydney, Brisbane and Hobart with the sprawling 'jumbo' cities of Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. He describes the earlier cities on the East

coast of America, and Sydney as compact, land-intensive cities conforming strongly to the structure of European cities: 'As the frontier was pushed further westward across the plains of North America and settlements spread over the arable portions of Australia mainly in the second half of the 19th century a second wave of city growth resulted'.⁵⁵ Frost characterises these new cities as low density, coping with rapid rates of population growth by spreading outwards through the replication of suburbs of single family houses, avoiding urban congestion.

Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth exemplified the new configuration of city growth. In 1890 Sydney and Melbourne were of roughly similar population but the metropolitan area of Sydney covered half that of Melbourne.⁵⁶ In this type of sprawling city only minor slum districts developed. Suburbanization was offered to the lower ranks as well as the elite:

The replication of low density middle class and working class suburbs created jumbo cities of then unmatched spatial extent, where the dream of living in a detached private and sanitary house in a suburban setting was most amply and democratically realized.⁵⁷

Frost states that the Anglo-Saxon desire for the privacy of living in a suburban setting was possible only when there was high average incomes to meet the heavy capital requirements of suburbia, and an efficient public transport system for easy access to the suburbs.⁵⁸ Even the high income earners in Sydney had to live in the inner city because it was established before the revolution in public transport occurred, and the government of the time deemed it too expensive and impractical to change the structure of the inner city for new transport facilities. Frost discusses the high cost of a low-density city. In the 19th century high density city enormous numbers of people could be housed with services, with only a sparing outlay of capital and use of land. Terrace houses and tenement buildings minimized the amount of

building material and land needed to shelter a family. Roads, tram lines and water, sewer and gas pipes had only to be laid short distances to serve large numbers.⁵⁹ Frost cites H.J. Dyos, a British urban historian who urged.

The principle function of such high density housing districts was to conserve scarce housing resources and release capital for the industrial and commercial development upon which 19th century urban cities depend for their economic growth and prosperity.⁶⁰

Nowadays the compact pre-industrial structure of Australia's early cities has almost totally disappeared. The issue of urban sprawl is now of major concern for Australia and indeed overseas. The video *Housing For All*, released by the Department of Planning (New South Wales),⁶¹ promotes the idea of 'urban consolidation' in an effort to deal with the expensive phenomenon of sprawl. The first section of the video says that since World War One Sydney's detached style suburbs have continued to grow, placing pressure on valuable land resources. The number of people living in the older, more central suburbs where infrastructure already exists has declined: 70 per cent of the houses in these suburbs are not occupied by family groups; half of city dwellings house only one or two people; half a million houses will be needed to house the growing population over the next ten years. The second section begins... 'By urban consolidation we mean... increasing the dwellings or population or both in an established area where infrastructure such as a good public transport system is already in place'.⁶² Through the video, environmental planners state that medium density housing works best for consolidation in the form of townhouses, villa homes (small homes in a village setting), single dwellings (on small lots with community facilities), strata title units, multi-story developments (where appropriate) and 'shared accommodation' (the video does not mention the term 'dual occupancy'). The voice on the video claims that

consolidation will reduce air and water pollution; enhance the sense of community; bring housing services and employment together in a more integrated way; decrease our dependence on the car; enhance our quality of life; save taxpayers' money in the provision of services, and what is saved will go back to improve services such as schools, hospitals and roads, and lastly, urban consolidation will give one the option of spending one's whole life in the same area.⁶³

The video also includes a section from the Housing Industry of New South Wales. They say that urban consolidation is good because it shows that medium density housing and 'good' design are reconcilable, and that it permits the developer to design, construct and market this type of housing which is not normally available in this type of area. The density of the subdivision means the site can 'stack up commercially from the developer's perspective'.⁶⁴ (The level of public excitement on this last point is questionable!) The video concludes by assuring us that we will have greater housing choice for our lifestyle, as well as the environmental, social and economic benefits of urban consolidation. It informs us of the bipartisan support for the urban consolidation that will bring us a livable city for future generations.⁶⁵

2:3

Although urban consolidation may seem the sensible way to go, especially when painted in such a pretty way, many people are strongly opposed to the idea. The prominent urban thinker Patrick Troy, author of *The Perils of Urban Consolidation*, uncovers the fudging of figures and lack of public consultation by the government on this issue. Troy attacks the idea that life will be better with consolidation and asks the question: Why change what is already

working? He says the traditional urban and suburban structure is generally what people want. Troy is not seeking an alternative to this, the choice of the people, but rather to the policy of urban consolidation, a Commonwealth and State Government initiative.⁶⁶ Troy says that the government is taking an efficiency-based approach to housing policy, and in doing so, solutions to problems imagined or real, become 'over determined.' Consolidation policy does not respond to fashions, household transitions and the way we relate to changes in environmental factors.⁶⁷

From Troy's insights we can see that consolidation policy is about changing the fundamental structure of our built environments and hoping the people who inhabit those environments will happily conform. Consolidation aims to increase 'efficiency' in the use of household stock, as we gather from the *Housing for All Video*, that claims 70 per cent of the houses in the suburbs are not occupied by family groups and half of city dwellings house only one or two people. Is this what Rudin and Falk were talking about with their ideas on city rejuvenation for the United Kingdom? What about the comparisons made by Frost in his account of 19th century Australian cities? The sprawling model was by far the best for the vast majority of people. In the sprawling cities, almost everyone could live in relative comfort in a home they could call their own. Today it appears this is still much the case. Troy may be right when he says this is generally what people want. Because sprawl is now the choice of so many it becomes a problem of resources and environment, of services and social fabric. Troy states that consolidation policies will deepen the division between rich and poor, marking it with extensive areas of lower quality built environment. Furthermore he claims there is no evidence this will improve the notions of social justice or the way our cities are

developed and operated: consolidation is based on simplistic 'physical determinism' – that is, by increasing density, infrastructure and services, costs would be reduced:

It is unlikely that policies based on a simple physical determinism – in which the physical form of development is assumed to be the determinant of behavior – and simplistic economism can long be sustained against economic and socio-political pressures.⁶⁸

Troy says the environmental case for consolidation has been reduced to a narrow and misleading concern for energy consumption.⁶⁹ Proponents of consolidation claim to reduce travel and therefore energy consumption. They also say housing and workplaces should be mixed together so people can find employment closer to where they live, and they also will be able to satisfy social and cultural needs closer to home. Troy compares this to a medieval setting. He says the proponents of a compact city with its mixed uses forget their own urban history; a major reason for the separation of houses from place of work was the injurious effect on people's health of many industries and workplaces. Another was the low level of amenity mixed development offers.⁷⁰ Troy says few industries comply with noise, air/smell and effluent quality standards and mixing industry with where people live increases the chance of road and industrial accidents. Troy quotes Hugh Stretton...

The Australian preference for family life in private houses and gardens is probably intelligent. Instead of despising the suburbs we should work to improve them...⁷¹

Troy believes that the demographic argument for consolidation in the claims that the form of Australian cities does not reflect the needs of the households within them is not supported by the behavior of those households. He states there is little evidence to support the claims of better services and improved choice and that consolidation proponents have resorted to the ability to market medium density housing as evidence of the success of the policy. Troy contends consolidation will reduce housing quality for lower middle and lower income

members of the community and that the policies are based on flawed analysis and misrepresentation of the facts. He argues that the figures for average house size are so unreliable they can form no basis for a sensible housing policy, while the focus on average house size is irrelevant as is most of the justification for consolidation. He says the argument about choice of either housing or lifestyle ignores the fact that people already have and exercise choice. The pro-choice argument is based on romantic notions of urban life rather than fact.⁷² At the current rate of construction it would take 100 years to build new stock and replace old stock to achieve the stock of housing which had the efficiency characteristics proponents of consolidation desire. A reduction in cars in urban areas would have greater effects more quickly. Energy reductions due to changes in city form are even harder to achieve and even slower to introduce than changes in housing stock because they are directed at the physical outcomes of a complex set of economic and social processes but not at the processes themselves.⁷³ Troy says we should focus on areas amenable to a high rate of change- things that have a high rate of depreciation.

In their book *Cities Back From the Edge: New Life for Downtown*, urban critics Roberta Brandes Gratz and Norman Mintz are concerned that while many American cities are experiencing positive change and sustainable growth this good news is not acknowledged as significant in official circles of influence. They make a distinction between 'Project Plans' and 'Urban Husbandry'. By Project Plans Gratz and Mintz mean a downtown which is rebuilt but not reborn; bankers' plans, planners' plans, politicians' plans and developers' plans dictate the form of the urban environment.⁷⁴ Gratz and Mintz,

Easily all of these project plans still add up to no place, no economic diversification and no growth. No expansion of the local economy. No meaningful opportunity. No

excitement. No sidewalk bustle. No serendipity. No intermingling. No street theater. No people contact. No added residential population. No informal gathering or people watching. No complexity that should distinguish downtown. No life except during scheduled events or at a limited site.⁷⁵

Gratz and Mintz say they have visited and studied hundreds of ‘downtowns’ in the United States and have talked with residents to designers and students to shoppers. They say there is a sameness and sadness in all the developed downtowns and a variety and excitement to all revived ones. What do they think of consolidation? Although the actual word did not appear in their book there was this...

‘Enduring positive change occurs slowly. No big ideas will be offered. No big new government plans will be proposed. Just the opposite. So much time, money, energy and attention are focussed on directions and projects that are big, visible, simplistic and wrong.’⁷⁶

Here one is reminded of Troy and his argument against physical determinism, where simply changing the structure of the environment is assumed to address the complexities of the built environment and its inhabitants. But on Australia’s built environment Troy asks, ‘Why change what is already working?’ when, ‘traditional urban and suburban structure is generally what people want.’ In America sprawl is far from what the people want, and sprawl in Australia is of equal concern. Growing up in Legana, just north of Launceston, I have watched the transformation of a country town into something resembling Legoland, complete with the recently opened Roelf Vos Supermarket *Plus Petrol*, Tasmania’s version of *Wal Mart*, America’s largest suburban retailer. In Legana, what was once native bushland, orchards and paddocks rapidly ‘developed’ into a sea of houses, the bulk of which sit in a slight valley, so on entering the town the first thing one notices is the undulating rooftops – like a mass of upturned boats on a rolling ocean.

2:4

If we cannot consolidate and if we don't want to add to the expensive problem of sprawl what are our options? What form should Australia's built environment take that will counter sprawl and save our urban spaces? Perhaps to answer these questions we need to understand the delicate balance between the need for company and for feeling part of a community and the need for space and privacy. I think sprawl is larger than life – on too large a scale for human beings to properly understand, at least in terms of a sense of place. Similarly, to carve out my own sense of place in my field, I had to give myself a realistic challenge. Before I reduced the size of my canvas I had trouble focussing. I struggled to fill the painting space with the idea. I feel I have progressed to a level of being able to articulate my own visual language because I gave myself an achievable goal – to fill a smaller canvas. My aim is to answer the question: 'Can I achieve through painting an image which represents a meeting point between the 'inside' – the human body, consciousness and the unconscious, and the 'outside' – the built environment? Jeffrey Smart has created such images but with less humanness than I would like. Although Smart does include the human figure his work is more about the built spaces we occupy rather than my field of interest: where the figure exists in, and the effect on ourselves of living in, these spaces.

Painting for me has generated the theoretical body of my research. Theory in turn supports the painting and therefore suggests it is certainly possible to for me to create a new language of people and place; a language with the individual as its driving force, situated within the built environment. Launceston and its surrounds are central to my work and because it feels

home I am concerned for its future. It is a city that is just large enough to feel like a city but not large enough to feel truly cosmopolitan. It lacks the size and therefore the diversity to renew itself often enough to be in touch with the direction of the larger national and international centres. Hobart, Tasmania's capital city, has always been the prime centre for commerce and industry. Its larger population means it enjoys greater diversity and therefore has a larger cultural appetite than Launceston, attracting major exhibitions, rock concerts and sporting events. Launceston's Inveresk redevelopment of the Railyards and of York Park will rival Hobart's Salamanca Place and Bellerive Oval in terms of popularity, but Launceston's awkward size is a problem. To break the parochial, antisocial behavior of many of its younger occupants, such as the 'blocky' phenomenon, where young drivers do circuits around the one way streets of the city centre *ad-nauseam*, and the usual weekend binge of alcohol and violence, the streets must first be places for people, not for cars and alcohol. The recent redevelopment of Launceston's Charles and George Streets, where the footpaths have been widened with colourful pavers and the street itself resurfaced, is a step forward. For their official opening a section of each street was set up for people to dine to live entertainment, but now it is ruled once again by traffic, except for some alfresco dining. Is trying to enjoy a meal over a busy street the best we can do?

To achieve real change our central urban spaces must be dominated by people, not traffic. Only then can our cities evolve into rich and diverse meeting places encouraging communication and growth for the individual and the community. I think the redevelopment of the Railyards is an attempt to create this meeting place, but it is not the center of Launceston. Perhaps we are trying to create a new center, rather than dramatically alter the

form and philosophy of the existing one. This new centre will be people driven and at the centre of its philosophy is creativity. This will be a built environment that encourages self-expression. It is ironic then that I have chosen the Railyards to express alienation and desolation, but if you stand close enough, you can also see in my work a sense of renewal. To reinforce the sense of change; of movement back and forth, I now shift between a small and large canvas size. I had to go small before I could understand why I was to go large. This movement enables me to maintain a space for each binary to exist, a constant that is governed by the surreal state that I try to make visual and seeable. The Railyards are at once foreboding and friendly, old and new, body and environment, inside and outside. This gives them a dreamy timelessness that hovers between the real and the surreal and this is what I try to capture.

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